Outdoor Play Benefits

"I like to play indoors better 'cause that's where all the electric outlets are."

- A 4th Grader in San Diego, quoted in *Last Child in the Woods* by Richard Louv

Many of us remember the phrase, "Go outside and play!" from childhood, but children today spend less time playing outdoors than any previous generation (Clements, 2004; Hofferth and Curtin, 2006). Free play and discretionary time has declined more than 9 hours a week over the last 25 years. A new Nielson Company Report indicates that children ages two-five years old now spend more than 32 hours a week on average in front of a TV screen. According to the Keiser Family Foundation (2010), the amount of screen time only increases with age, with school-aged children spending 7.5 hours a day on electronic media.

The percentage of preschool children who are overweight more than tripled between 1971 and 2009, exploding from 5.8% in 1971 to 18.4% in 2009 (Odgen et al, 2007; Anderson, 2009). Six out of ten of these preschoolers will continue to be overweight or obese at age 12 (NICHD, 2006). The situation is so severe that this generation of children's life span is predicted to be shorter than that of their parents.

Tap into the benefits of outdoor play!

Encouraging children to get outside, get moving, and connect with the natural world are all ways to reverse childhood obesity rates. But, the benefits don't stop there. Kids who play outside are happier, healthier, and stronger!

According to research (Fjortoft 2004; Burdette and Whitaker 2005), children who play outdoors regularly:

- Become fitter and leaner
- Develop stronger immune systems
- Have more active imaginations
- Have lower stress levels
- Play more creatively
- Have greater respect for themselves and others

Time spent outdoors is also the best way to get vitamin D. According to the journal *Pediatrics*, 70% of American kids are not getting enough vitamin D, which can lead to a host of health issues. Time spent outdoors is also shown to reduce myopia (near sightedness) in children (*Optometry and Vision Science, 2008)*.

Outdoor play – it's not just FUN, it's good for you!

Focus On Fun:

Invite parents to Outdoor Play Time-share HSBS activity ideas & resources

Host a healthy picnic

Rake leaves, plant flowers, or roll down a hill

Create a painted rock garden

Hop like bunnies, jump like frogs & slither like snakes

Plan a Nature Walk! Check out *Nature Explore's* Families' Club Kit for easy to use age appropriate activities, at www.arborday.org

HEAD START BODY START
National Center for Physical Development and Outdoor Play